



SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTER
CRESTON, IOWA**

One-Stop Profile

June 1996

Based on a Site Visit Conducted During May 1996

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTER CRESTON, IOWA One-Stop Profile

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTER CRESTON, IOWA One-Stop Profile

DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The Workforce Development Center (Center) in Creston is the designated One-Stop center serving SDA 14, a predominantly rural area in southwestern Iowa. Although Center staff provide workforce development services throughout the region by traveling regularly to satellite or “itinerant” locations hosted by a variety of social service agencies, this profile focuses on the Creston Center.

The Creston Workforce Development Center is located in downtown Creston, a small town of 3,000 people in the heart of Union County about 70 miles southeast of Des Moines. The official Center service area covers seven counties (Adair, Adams, Clarke, Decatur, Ringgold, Taylor, and Union) with a combined population of about 55,000 residents. Center staff indicated that they often provide services to residents of Madison and Warren counties as well.¹

The employment outlook in the seven-county region is somewhat bleak. Structural dislocation in both agriculture and manufacturing has led to a substantial erosion of the local economic base over the last fifteen years. During the past three years, the largest employer in six of the seven counties has closed, moved, or downsized. As a result, there are few large employers left in the SDA and remaining employers are able to draw employees from the entire region. The official unemployment rate stands at about 7%, but staff indicated that this figure is a significant underestimate and that *underemployment* is also a serious problem.

Because so many local residents have been affected by economic dislocations caused by the failure of family farms, the downsizing or closure of manufacturing plants, or natural disasters (e.g. floods, tornadoes), there is little stigma attached to receiving assistance from taxpayer-supported programs. Thus the Creston Workforce

¹ These two counties, although officially part of the Des Moines service delivery area, share the largely rural character of SDA 14. Local respondents said that customers from these counties feel more comfortable seeking services in Creston than in downtown Des Moines.

Development Center has an easier time marketing its services to local residents than do centers in areas where the local culture discourages participation in public programs.

The Creston Center is still in the early stages of efforts to establish consolidated workforce development services. Although partners agree on the benefits to be obtained from co-location and closer coordination of services, agreement has not yet been reached on whether or how to integrate service delivery across participating partners. The local vision of One-Stop service delivery is focused on (1) simplifying and coordinating program services; (2) creating more flexible service-delivery structures; (3) ensuring high standards of service for individual and employer customers; and (4) planning for consolidation, and possible eventual integration, of common functions among partner agencies and programs. Among the local partners, some staff are reluctant to relinquish individual program identities and be subsumed under a single workforce development entity; others see such integration as an important means of providing high quality customer service; still others express a desire for a middle-ground wherein some functions would be integrated and others would remain program-based.

Two types of contextual variables have influenced the development of the One-Stop approach in Creston: *state and federal initiatives* that affect local decision-making with regard to workforce development issues, and factors associated with the *local context*. Among the federal- and state-level factors are: (1) an expectation of funding reductions in federal budget allocations to local sites under block grants; and (2) uncertainty, at least in the short term, about the structures for organization and governance of state and local workforce development programs. Local factors that impact the emergence of the One-Stop system include: (3) strong local support for welfare reform efforts; (4) limited employment opportunities in the local economy; (5) the large size and rural nature of the local service delivery area; and (6) the personalized small-town/rural culture of the community served by the Creston Center. Each of these factors is briefly described below:

- *A number of the partner programs and agencies, including ES, UI, and VETS, have experienced substantial funding cuts in recent years. At the time of the site visit it was expected that the transition to block grants would be accompanied by further reductions in overall budget allocations.* The threat of budget cutbacks causes local respondents to have mixed feelings about the One-Stop initiative. On the one hand, Center staff fear that the One-Stop initiative will disguise the impact of the funding reductions to the general public and create unrealistic

expectations that staff can “do more with less.” On the other hand, Center staff perceive the importance of developing more cost-effective ways to provide high-quality services to larger numbers of customers.

- *At the time of the site visit, there was considerable uncertainty over the organizational and governance arrangements for One-Stop at both the state and local levels.* State policymakers were in the midst of a major reorganization of state government that unified a number of different workforce development programs in a single state agency. During the transition to the integrated state agency, state staff were not always ready to provide policy guidance on a number of issues ranging from the use of the state’s logo for One-Stop centers to the selection of local service providers under One-Stop. Local staff are concerned about job security, wages, benefits, and overall issues of control among the local partners. Furthermore, local partners are concerned that they will be required to compete among themselves for future contracts to operate the Center. These issues have the potential to undermine efforts to develop integrated service delivery and team-oriented approaches to service design and Center management.
- *There is strong local support for PROMISE JOBS, the state’s welfare-to-work initiative, which calls for participants to move rapidly toward full-time employment.* To encourage the transition from welfare to work, the program offers transitional benefits and supportive services to assist families in leaving public assistance programs. Because of the strong work philosophy guiding this program, extended post-secondary training prior to employment is no longer encouraged for JOBS customers. The initiative increases the pressure on Workforce Development Centers to assist customers with direct placement, rather than to develop expanded opportunities to enroll customers in training programs.
- *The local service area has experienced both major economic shifts and serious natural disasters during recent years, causing widespread economic hardship.* The farm crisis of the mid-1980s, dislocations resulting from the foreign relocation or closure of local manufacturing firms, and the floods of 1993 were among the most frequently cited reasons for the chronically high unemployment rates and stagnant regional economy. In this environment, the objective of helping customers prepare for and find high-quality employment is very difficult to realize. It is also difficult for Center staff to market public services to employers in a labor market environment in which numerous applicants for most job openings can be recruited by word-of-mouth.
- *The geographic area served by the Creston Workforce Development Center is large—covering 3,000 square miles—and rural. Few roads, long distances between towns, and poor public transportation make it*

difficult for many potential customers to travel to the Creston Center. Because of this difficulty, participating partner agencies have developed a service delivery strategy that encourages staff travel to out-stationed service sites. Representatives from programs such as the Older Workers Program or Veterans Employment Program travel from town to town during the week, occupying space provided by county agencies or other public and private social service providers.

- *The local political culture and the multiple social relationships among small-town residents increases the probability that staff from the participating agencies know each other personally and/or know their customers.* This personalized nature of relationships among partners and between service providers and customers tends to increase the accountability and responsiveness of staff to customer needs. Additionally, it has assisted in the development of informal coordination efforts across partner agencies. Ironically, it may also impede the development of formal memoranda of understanding among partners.²

In the local environment described above, the development of a One-Stop workforce development system faces serious design and implementation challenges. For the most part, the partners at the Creston Workforce Development Center are addressing these challenges with good will and enthusiasm.

ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE

Oversight and Administration. To guide One-Stop planning efforts, local partners initially convened an informal planning group with broad representation from workforce development, education, and human service agencies. Members included representatives from the agencies responsible for JTPA, Wagner-Peyser, welfare, vocational rehabilitation, the community college system, the Iowa State University, local primary and secondary education providers, as well as local community action agencies and local employers. Over time, this group has evolved into a 13-member “regional work group” that serves as the formal advisory body to the emerging One-Stop initiative. Eight different agencies are represented on the current regional work group. The work group coordinates services across the partner agencies and supervises the sharing of office space within the Creston facility. In addition, the JTPA Private

² Respondents suggested that the development of formal agreements in a small-town culture would be interpreted as a sign that the local partners did not trust each other.

Industry Council, because of its important role in overseeing local JTPA programs, has also been influential in providing policy guidance to the emerging One-Stop initiative.

The local governance structure for One-Stop services is expected to change as a result of state legislation passed in the spring of 1996, although the scope and specific nature of the changes were not yet apparent at the time of the site visit. The state legislation calls for the creation of a *Regional Advisory Board* to advise the state Workforce Development Department and Workforce Development Board about regional workforce development needs, assist in decisions about the state award of grants or contracts for the delivery of regional workforce development services, and monitor the performance of local service providers. According to the new legislation, Regional Advisory Board members will be appointed by the governor based on recommendations submitted by local elected officials. Regional boards are slated to include representatives from business and labor, county and municipal elected officials, and representatives from local community colleges. Local respondents expect that there will be some continuity between the current makeup of the JTPA Private Industry Council and/or the regional work group and the Regional Advisory Board.

The vision described in the recent state legislation calls for the state to become a “broker” rather than a direct provider of local workforce development services.³ Under the competitive model articulated in the legislation and promoted by the new state Workforce Development Department director, existing public workforce development agencies, such as local Wagner-Peyser and JTPA administrative entities, will be encouraged to compete for service contracts with other non-governmental entities. Thus, in the future, local partners may be able to compete against each other or form a consortium to become the designated local One-Stop provider.

At the present time, however, the key providers of public workforce development services in SDA 14 include Job Service, staffed by state employees who recently became part of an integrated state Workforce Development Department,⁴ and MATURA, a local community action agency which is the local JTPA administrative

³ This vision presumed the passage of federal block grant legislation for workforce development services.

⁴ At the time of the site visit, WDD was about to be created as an integrated state agency responsible for overseeing Job Service, JTPA, and other workforce development programs previously housed in separate agencies.

entity for SDA 14 and employs local JTPA staff. These two agencies, along with the three additional “core” partners (described below), provide services at the Creston Workforce Development Center.

Currently, the Creston Center is managed by a Center Director, who is the SDA director for the local JTPA program. The SDA director and the local Job Service office manager coordinate in administering the Center’s day-to-day functions. The Center Director, selected with the agreement of the state’s regional Job Service manager, is responsible for overall management of the shared physical facility and day-to-day operations of the Creston Workforce Development Center partners. He also serves as the primary liaison between the various state agencies, departments, and programs represented at the center.

The Center Director is clearly interested in emphasizing a team-based, participatory management style. Since the local staff of the Creston Center is relatively small, *all* staff are involved in weekly planning meetings at which issues affecting the operation and future of the Center are discussed. The Center Director views such grassroots staff involvement as an important capacity-building tool for local staff. As the various partners jointly plan and administer the Center, they increase their familiarity with the range of services offered at the Center, and begin to think of themselves as Center representatives, rather than as representatives of their individual programs and agencies. Such familiarity is also crucial in supporting the Center’s community outreach and “itinerant” services efforts. Because so many of the partners provide services off-site, they must be able to field questions and inquiries about Center operations and activities and provide referral information, as well as deliver services on behalf of their own individual programs or agencies.

Core Partners. Five agencies are “core” partners in the Creston Workforce Development Center. Each of these agencies has staff housed in the Creston Center and each is an active participant in Center planning and administration. Core partners include:

- *The Job Service Division of the Iowa Workforce Development Department (WDD)*—formerly the Department of Employment Security (DES). Job Service employees provide UI, Wagner-Peyser-funded activities (ES), and VETS services to Center customers. Job Service is also a contractor for the state’s PROMISE JOBS program for AFDC recipients, which it operates jointly with the local JTPA program staff, and the Food Stamp Employment and Training program.

- *MATURA*, a community action agency that is the administrative entity for the Job Training Partnership Act in SDA 14. MATURA staff provide services under JTPA programs for economically disadvantaged and dislocated workers. They also administer discretionary grants received from federal and state departments after a series of recent floods, tornadoes, and other natural disasters to support disaster clean-up initiatives. MATURA is also a contractor for training services to PROMISE JOBS participants, but, at the time of the site visit, had no funds available to enroll new customers in this program.
- *Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR)*. Two DVR staff are housed at the Center. Although interested in participating in One-Stop services as a strategy to improve services for all customers, these individuals have been prevented by legislative/regulatory barriers from working with customers who are not eligible for DVR services.
- *Area 14 Agency on Aging*. This agency maintains a half-time older worker specialist at the Center, funded under the state's Retired Iowan Community Employment Program (RICEP) to administer older worker programs. She is housed with the Job Service staff at the Center and participates in planning meetings when she is on-site.

In addition to sharing the physical space at the Center, each of the core partners is participating, although to varying degrees, in plans for the consolidation of some common functions.

Non-Core Partners. The Center staff is also in the process of establishing policies and procedures governing the participation of partners who are not co-located in the Center, but who offer complementary services. Additional “non-core” partners, with whom the Center coordinates through agency representation on formal and informal planning groups, include the following:

- *The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS)*, which is responsible for cash assistance and other family support services and is represented on the regional work group. Although DHS has been an active partner in One-Stop planning at the state level, this agency has been less active in local planning efforts for the Creston site. The local DHS office is located only a short distance from the Center and staff are usually able to coordinate services to clients receiving services from both systems. At the present time, Center partners do not have the ability to access electronic information from the DHS system. Once this barrier is overcome, increased coordination will be more feasible.
- *Southwestern Community College*. Representatives from the College participate on the regional work group and are actively involved in local planning and administration of the One-Stop initiative. Referral

linkages between JTPA and the College are also strong, since approximately one-third of the community college's student population of 1,200 are enrolled in JTPA programs. Some respondents fear that the College may choose to compete with the current core partners for future One-Stop service delivery contracts.

- *The extension campuses of Iowa State University and the University of Iowa.* These educational institutions participated in the initial planning group for the local One-Stop initiative but are not currently participating on the regional work group. Center staff expect the two universities to become increasingly important providers of training services to Center customers as the state develops its new fiber-optic network and creates new opportunities for remote learning.
- *Local primary and secondary school systems.* Although K-12 schools were involved in early informal planning meetings, they are not represented on the current regional work group. Core partners have invited the primary and secondary schools into the One-Stop initiative because of increasing interest in coordinating One-Stop and school-to-work strategies at the local level. Potential connections include coordinated regional planning efforts as well as recruitment of local students and educators as customers of the information services available in the Center's Resource Room.

The Local Council of Governments, the JTPA Private Industry Council, and two local community action agencies have also been involved in planning the new workforce development initiative and are likely to maintain an important role through participation on local advisory boards. They have also played an important role in linking workforce development programs and staff to economic development agencies and initiatives. These varied stakeholders are beginning to recognize the benefits to be obtained from marketing the region as a whole to potential new employers, rather than competing with each other to attract new businesses.

In summary, the local organization of the One-Stop initiative in the Creston Workforce Development Center is characterized by (1) recent co-location of core workforce development partners; (2) commitment to a common interagency planning process; and (3) varying levels of support among "core partners" in planning for the consolidation or integration of services. Future state-level decisions may transform the local delivery framework by introducing a competitive process for selecting which agencies will deliver local workforce development services.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

Local communication and coordination mechanisms for supporting One-Stop development include weekly staff planning meetings, as well as regular meetings of the regional work group. To date, the primary focus of these planning groups has been on physically integrating the space of the Creston Center, and transforming the center into a single shared office, rather than on coordinating the several programs housed side-by-side in the same physical structure.

Only after co-location of the core partners was accomplished in January 1996 did the various planning meetings begin to strategize about the potential for new services and improved service delivery. Uncertainty and fear of change in such basic areas as job security, wages and benefits, and the need for flexible staff schedules to support expanded office hours have hampered efforts by One-Stop facilitators to focus staff attention on these issues. All of the partners indicated that the process of co-location and the regular Center-wide staff meetings have provided staff with opportunities to better understand the roles of other partner agencies and programs, but many staff still find it difficult to relinquish individual program identities in favor of a single shared Center identity.

The Center Director sees improved daily communication among Center staff as one way to overcome this challenge and support the development of a unified Center identity among staff. To support improved communication across Center partners, the Center recently installed an integrated phone system that allows for the transfer of calls between employees of different programs housed at the Center. Staff were generally positive about the degree to which the system has rendered intra-office communication more efficient and effective, although individual staff indicated that they required additional training to be able to use the system to its full capacity.⁵

Direct communication between the Creston Center and the state One-Stop team has generally occurred through the Center Director, who then shares information with the rest of the staff. Although this strategy ensures that local staff have access to the identical information, it has limited the opportunities for staff to discuss issues related

⁵ Customers of the Center were not so positive about the new phone system, because it offered a self-driven menu of recorded messages as the initial screen to inform customers about available services. Customers much preferred the previous system in which they were connected to a “real person” when they called one of the Center partners.

to One-Stop service design with workforce development staff outside the local area. Most local respondents indicated that they would like to have broadened day-to-day communication between state and local staff of different programs or agencies.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS, BUDGETING AND FISCAL ISSUES

To support the creation of an integrated workforce development center by the local One-Stop partners, SDA 14 received \$190,000 from the state's first year Implementation Grant funds. Most of the local One-Stop funds were used to remodel the new Center facility so that it would support coordinated services among the agencies located at the Center. At a cost of \$150,000, local partners had a contractor remove a wall that formerly divided the Center space into two separate halves in order to create an attractive unified office space. Additional One-Stop funds in the amount of \$22,000 were used to select and install a shared telephone system to be used by all on-site partners. Additionally, the Iowa General Services Administration contributed \$29,000 on behalf of Job Service for the purchase of new shared fax and copy machines for use by all Center partners. These shared purchases, in combination with the new spatial arrangement at the Creston Center, are laying the groundwork for increasing coordination, and eventual integration of services among Center partners.

At the time of the site visit, no formal cost-sharing arrangements had been developed to support consolidated Center services using categorical funding streams. The Center space is still paid for by two separate leases maintained by the state Workforce Development Department (for Job Service) and MATURA (for the JTPA program staff).

DESIGN OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE

Evolution and General Description of Local Design

When local partners first started planning for a One-Stop approach to the delivery of workforce development services, Job Service and JTPA were located in different buildings. Although JTPA and Job Service were interested in co-locating, DES had signed a ten-year lease on its space only two years before the planning process began. Partners were originally under the impression that the state of Iowa would support lease buy-outs that would enable core partners to relocate. However, after the planning process had begun, local partners learned that the state would *not* provide such funds. So, to achieve co-location, the JTPA program finally arranged to "swap"

its leased space with the local Social Security Administration office, which had been housed in the same building as Job Service.

The move took place during the winter of 1995-96. Remodeling of the combined space began shortly thereafter. Although co-location is only a small part of the long-term One-Stop vision of local partners, it was a crucial first step in that (1) co-location was a tangible symbol of the shift to workforce development as a single initiative, rather than a complicated maze of categorical programs, and (2) until co-location was accomplished, partners were hampered in their ability to plan for coordination/integration of services.

More recently, core partners have begun to focus on new services that the Center, as a single entity, could provide employer and individual customers. The local planners are aware that the state will need to take the lead on many of the changes that will influence One-Stop service delivery at the local level—from decisions about the selection of and relationships between contracted service providers at the local level, to designs for integrated customer information systems and intake procedures. Nevertheless, the local partners have attempted to define customer service improvements that can be accomplished at the local level without being contradicted by subsequent state design initiatives. Current areas of interest for coordinated/integrated services include shared outreach and marketing of the services available from all core partners as well as the development of an integrated intake and referral process for all partners.

The local partners representing vocational rehabilitation and older worker services are clear about wanting to be involved in planning for integrated services from the “ground up,” so that One-Stop services will be as responsive as possible to the special needs of their particular target groups. They also believe that consolidated services, if designed from a customer service perspective, can improve service quality for all customers. In addition, all partners see a potential benefit for the workforce development system as a whole from improved coordination between workforce development services and economic development and school-to-work initiatives.

Relevance of the Local Design to the Four Federal Goals

Universal Access

Among the challenges faced by staff of the Creston Center in operationalizing the concept of universal access are: (1) how to maintain high quality services for customers

eligible for enhanced services through various categorical programs; and (2) how to develop new services that will appeal to a wide range of employer and individual customers (including “value-added” services for which the center might charge).

Each of these issues is being discussed on a regular basis by the core Center partners as well as among the planning partners. At the time of the site visit, however, local staff indicated that little tangible progress could be made until the state implemented its integrated Department of Workforce Development⁶ and provided clearer policy directives to local areas.

Although there is widespread general support among Center staff for the concept of universal access, some partners expressed a concern about how to preserve the quality of services offered to the current customers of categorical programs. For example, staff serving Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) customers indicated that they liked the fact that their customers would be less likely to be perceived as having “special needs” and would have improved access to a wide array of services. However, they were concerned that the service priority and service intensity granted DVR customers might diminish under a One-Stop system. They also worried that staff serving DVR customers under a One-Stop system would not have the same high level of specialized training and counseling credentials as current DVR staff. Similar concerns were expressed by the Veterans Employment Services staff on behalf of their customers.

Center staff have only recently begun to strategize about how to reach a broader range of job seeker and employer customers and what how to ensure that services will be attractive to this expanded customer population. Like the state One-Stop staff, staff in the Creston Center look to technology to support the process of universal services. Staff are aware that the state of Iowa is investing heavily in the development of new technology and technology-based products and services. For example, the Iowa Communications Network, a fiber optics network, will ultimately create opportunities for remote classroom training for Iowa residents throughout the state. The state is also investing in the development of automated self-service labor market information products. However, there is skepticism among some Center staff who feel that such

⁶ This took place on July 1, 1996.

new services, particularly self-driven services, will not appeal to many customers within SDA 14.

Finally, Center staff have discussed extending or adjusting center hours so that job-seekers who are already employed or in training programs have more opportunities to access services. Among the options being discussed are Saturday hours and extended evening hours once or twice per week. To date, however, state merit employees have been reluctant to commit to such changes without consulting their union representatives about what is and is not permissible under current regulations.

Finally, to make Center services accessible to residents throughout the seven-county region, Center staff have developed an elaborate network of remote service locations throughout the region. These locations include offices of government agencies, community-based organizations, and schools. Individual Center staff travel to these locations on a regular basis to meet with customers who cannot travel to Creston for services.

Customer Choice

The Center offers customers considerable choice in terms of *where* they can access services as well as *how* they may access services. All respondents emphasized the importance of providing customers with the opportunity to make informed and meaningful choices. In addition to the services provided by staff at the Creston Center or at outstationed service sites, customers may receive some services through a small number of kiosks located in public places such as the local shopping center. These have not been popular among customers, however, and have required considerable maintenance. As a result, staff did not think highly of them.

The Center Director envisions that technology-based products available in the Center's Resource Room will eventually offer customers a variety of assessment, job search, and resume support services, including self-driven and assisted services. With few exceptions, however, Center staff were ambivalent about the technology-based services offered or planned for the Resource Room, in part because they had not yet been trained in how to use these new applications, and in part because they feared that such automation would undermine the personal quality of services. Staff felt that the latter issue was particularly important in a rural area like Creston. "People expect

personal service here,” one staff person said, “and we need to be attentive to that when we design computer-driven forms of assistance.” ⁷

Integrated Services

Although there is increasing coordination between staff of partner agencies in the Creston Center, the only functions that have been integrated to date are customer reception, the management of the consolidated physical facility, and the provision of self-service automated information and training services in the Resource Room.

With the removal of the physical barrier that divided Job Service from JTPA, the partners established a common reception area to support the eventual goal of integrated services. This makes it possible for customers to inquire about Center services from a single receptionist, rather than having to navigate their way through a series of separate reception areas. Moreover, the common reception/waiting area is near the Resource Room and the Center staff encourage customers to explore the area while they are waiting to receive staffed services.

The Center is still assessing the need for a full- or part-time Resource Room specialist who could market the services available in the Resource Room and assist customers in using these services. Currently, the receptionist answers some questions, and other staff fill-in with customer support as needed. However, since many of the technology-based tools are new to the staff as well as to the customers, most staff need to be trained in their use before they can assist Center customers.

At the time of the site visit, the staff at the Center had many questions about how much discretion they would be allowed in integrating services across different funding streams. Partners felt burdened by agency or program regulations that they perceived as barriers to serving a broad range of customers or sharing funds across programs. Center staff hoped that the state would begin to assist local sites in breaking down some of these barriers, once the integrated Iowa Workforce Development Department was established at the state level.

⁷ This staff person reported that customers frustrated with the impersonal nature of the Center’s new menu-driven telephone system had confronted her with complaints at her home and in the local supermarket.

Performance-Driven/Outcome-Based

Local partners emphasized customer satisfaction as a key performance standard, at least partly because the limited job opportunities in the local economy preclude stellar performance on job placement measures. Providing high-quality customer service is a clear priority among all individual program or agency staff housed at the Center. Some staff attributed the importance of customer satisfaction to the “small-town” character of rural Iowa. If customer satisfaction is a problem, staff know that they will hear about it from friends, relatives, and neighbors. Most respondents felt that there is a higher level of accountability between Creston Center staff and customers than there would be in a more urban area because of the small-scale social networks. Moreover, precisely because of these close personal relationships, staff generally take a great deal of pride in their work because the customers that they are helping may also be friends and neighbors.

Center staff have not yet developed Center-wide performance measures. Rather, in the absence of a uniform Center identity, staff are still relying on program-based performance measures to assess their performance. Two reasons were cited for the decision not to emphasize performance measurement at this time: (1) the absence of an integrated information system that could track outcomes across partner programs; and (2) the desire to establish a more integrated system before implementing accountability mechanisms.

Center staff perceive the development of an integrated information system to support Center-wide accountability measures to be a state-level task. Furthermore, local staff indicated, this task must be accomplished before a local performance measurement system can be designed or implemented. Staff are aware that the state of Iowa is investing heavily in the development of a management information system that will vastly improve the ability of state and local agencies and programs to document services and outcomes and share information. Moreover, customer satisfaction tools and measures of customer utilization of self-service offerings are expected to comprise an important part of new accountability systems. Once the information systems necessary to support new accountability measures are established, Center staff expect to provide input into the development of specific reporting measures.

Individual staff members are wary of establishing performance measures too soon. They recognize that the Creston Center is still in the early stages of developing an integrated approach to customer services and feel that they need more time to assess

local needs and develop new and improved services. They expressed concern that the premature implementation of a uniform set of performance measures, even one reflecting a new customer service orientation and encouraging new employer services, will stifle innovation and experimentation among local sites. Local staff in Creston indicated that the Center required more time to “grow into its vision” before staff will be ready to implement performance measurement and continuous quality improvement mechanisms.

Physical Facilities

The Creston Workforce Development Center is located in a single-story office building on a main street in downtown Creston. The partners are pleased that an additional 2,000 square feet of unoccupied (and unrenovated) space adjoins the 8,000 square-foot Center space. Thus, if new partners join the Center or if the space needs of the current partners increases, expansion will be possible. To prepare the Center for shared occupancy by the current partners, the majority of the local One-Stop implementation grant funds was used to remove a wall and remodel the entire space. The facility is now clean, neat, modern, open, and ideal for shared operations that need to appeal to a broad range of individual and employer customers.

The integrated reception area is a key feature of the Workforce Development Center. As customers enter the Center, they are greeted at the reception area, and either directed to the appropriate office or asked to wait in the entrance area, where there are several new chairs, and a table stocked with the daily local paper and weekly regional papers. Customers are also encouraged to use the self-service offerings in the Resource Room (directly across from the reception area) while they wait. Although the current arrangement is aesthetically pleasing, partners are considering moving the reception area inside the Resource Room to encourage more customers to use the facilities there. Currently, although the Resource Room is in plain view of the waiting area, few customers are choosing to use it on their own initiative. Most sit or stand in the reception area while awaiting staffed services. When the appropriate staff member is available, customers are escorted or directed to the relevant office to receive services.

Since individual program/agency identities remain fairly strong at the Creston Center, customers received service only from staff employed by the agency or program funding the service. All JTPA program staff are housed in one half of the Center, along with staff employed by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. All Job

Service staff occupy the other half of the office, along with the older worker program representative and the veterans' services representative. The cubicles in the middle of the office are shared by staff representing additional programs, including the PROMISE JOBS program, Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services, and the dislocated farmworkers program. A shared set of file drawers are centrally located in the rear of the office. Shared production and supply rooms and an employee cafeteria are located on the JTPA side of the facility. A shared classroom/workshop room is located on the Job Service side.

Although the integrated reception function is seen as key to supporting the further integration of functions among Center staff, the current receptionist is also assigned other responsibilities and is not always available to greet customers when they enter the Center. Despite the program-specific allocation of space within the Center, individual offices do not have signs indicating the location of different programs. This makes it difficult for customers to find where they need to go when the receptionist is not at her desk. Customers who are not greeted at the door may end up walking around the Center searching for their case manager. To remedy the problem of lack of formal program signs, the PROMISE JOBS staff have hung temporary paper signs over their individual offices.

Partners are currently in the process of figuring out how to make decisions about a variety of issues related to sharing the physical facility. These issues include allocating desks and offices to staff who are present at the Center only part of the week; purchasing Center-wide equipment, supplies, and furniture; scheduling use of the single classroom space; sharing file space; and, in some cases, sharing individual case files. Currently there is no common lunchroom or conference room space outside of the classroom. Staff also are wrestling with whether and how to make additional Center space available for use by job seekers or employers (e.g., for employer interviews with prospective workers).

IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Staffing Arrangements

Prior to the One-Stop initiative, the core partners were housed in different buildings. Although the partners are currently co-located, the program and agency divisions that existed under the old system still manifest themselves in the shared office space: Job Service occupies one side of the building and JTPA the other. Although coordination among the core partners is a strong feature of the Creston Center, current

job assignments still follow programmatic, rather than functional, lines. With the exception of the reception staff and an administrative assistant/MIS liaison, both of whom are engaged in Center-wide operations, staff have not been cross-trained or assigned to perform integrated job functions across programs.

Initial planning efforts have attempted to identify areas of expertise associated with the different Center partners with a view toward eventual specialization by functional area when and if further cross-agency integration occurs. For example, staff have identified Job Service as having expertise in placement, labor market information, and unemployment compensation. JTPA has been identified as having expertise in rapid response to dislocations, job development, and on-the-job training. Ultimately, staff may be assigned to new positions by function rather than by program, in keeping with the assessment of expertise.

Capacity Building

The Center Director and the majority of the Center staff are aware of the state's efforts to support the transformation of individual employment and training programs into integrated workforce development centers through a coordinated capacity-building effort. Although the development of One-Stop training curricula was perceived as an appropriate state-level function, local staff in Creston expressed a desire to be more regularly informed about the state's training plans.

In Creston, local staff indicated two areas in which staff training is critically needed: (1) team building; and (2) use of technology. Study respondents indicated a high level of interest in formal training about the roles of different Center partners and how to work in teams. Staff training in team building would clearly support the long-term transformation of individual programs into integrated Center operations.

Training in new technologies, ranging from basic computer literacy to use of the Internet, new information systems, and the resources available in the Resource Room, is another critical need area. Currently, many staff are reluctant to refer customers to the Resource Room because the Center lacks the staff support to assist customers in using the available resources. Moreover, although staff are aware of the state's emphasis on technology-based services as a key component of its One-Stop vision, many staff at the Creston Center expressed skepticism that technology-based products could revitalize the public employment and training system. Clearly, local staff require

more information about the new technology-based products they will be receiving from the state so that they will be effective in sharing the technology with customers.

Management Information Systems (MIS)

Local respondents view management information systems as important tools to support developing integrated workforce development services. Early in the local One-Stop planning process, local partners identified developing an integrated intake form and process as a high priority for supporting the operation of the Center. The Creston partners requested funding from the state's second year One-Stop Implementation Grant to support the development of an integrated intake process that could be used by all local partners including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. However, this request was turned down by the state, because the state did not want to support the development of a different integrated intake process for each of the 16 local areas in the state.

Most staff at the Creston Center are now aware of Iowa's participation in a multi-state consortium developing integrated intake and case management systems for use across different workforce development programs. Fewer local staff are aware of the comprehensive nature of the state's information technology plan, which includes the construction of a statewide state-administered fiber optics network called the Iowa Communications Network.⁸

At the local level, the need for improved information exchange among local partners is evident. At the present time, although there are information-sharing agreements in place between some partners and programs, including agreements between Job Service and JTPA to share the case files of common customers, not all local staff have access to information that would help them serve shared customers. For example, the Center partners lack an automated information system to support coordinated services for employer customers. Currently informal communication channels are the only mechanism for insuring that different job developers do not contact the same employer.

⁸ The ICN is on its way to becoming operational, having achieved at least one point of presence in every county. In the Creston area, Southwestern Community College maintains the connection.

Labor Market Information and Related Information Technology Improvements

At the state level, Iowa is investing in the creation of new automated user-friendly databases of information on careers, labor markets, and training opportunities. However, Creston staff are not yet convinced that these new products will be viewed as useful resources by employers or individual job-seeking customers. Perceived barriers to their use include the small number of local employers and an apparent customer aversion to the impersonal nature of automated services.⁹ Responses by Creston staff, described below, reveal that the state of Iowa needs to devote substantial energy to marketing its LMI products to the staff of local Centers such as Creston.

Local staff also expressed concern over the accuracy of existing LMI data. For example, there is widespread perception among staff that reported local unemployment rates are highly inaccurate. This perception encourages a high level of skepticism about other labor market information as well. Staff expressed concern that the increasing sophistication of the new automated information systems will obscure the questionable quality of the data.

In addition, there was great concern among staff that new products being developed by the state would be skewed toward serving *highly* skilled job seekers, even though the state welfare-to-work initiative is expected to vastly increase the number of *low-skilled* job-seekers. Staff also indicated that customers at the Creston Center would find the information provided by these systems less useful than customers at other Centers because most job seekers in the Creston area are unwilling to relocate for new jobs. Moreover, because the community is relatively small, and the number of employers few, most job-seekers are aware of the major employers already. Staff doubt that customers will use new LMI products to locate potential employers.

Staff did express mild enthusiasm however, for a particular application of new LMI products: to support local school-to-work initiatives. The Creston Center hopes to evolve into a resource for local schools and vocational education programs. New LMI products would support this initiative in two ways: (1) the data could assist young

⁹ Although the Center has automated ALEX job listings, customers still use the hard copy “paper” job boards to get information about available jobs. Almost no one currently uses the computers to look up job descriptions, even though it would be far more efficient for customers to review these descriptions before asking a staff person for help.

people in developing career plans; and (2) high-tech delivery mechanisms will be likely to appeal to these young customers.

Marketing

Marketing is a new activity for the staff of the Creston Center. Local staff have responded positively to One-Stop marketing advice and technical assistance from the state staff. However, before engaging in a large-scale marketing campaign, local partners want to create a more stable and cohesive internal Center environment. Although the core partners currently collaborate extensively, a number of partners expressed concern about marketing an integrated Center before full-scale integration had actually occurred.

At the time of the site visit, marketing efforts were also on hold because local staff were still waiting for the state to make some final decisions about the use of the state One-Stop logo. There was some question about whether the state logo developed for One-Stop was going to be used to represent the multi-agency One-Stop initiative or the newly established Department of Workforce Development. At the time of the site visit, the state logo was being used in the signage identifying the Creston Workforce Development Center. The logo was also used on some Center letterhead, but not yet on all of the fax cover sheets and other business forms. Until the state clarifies the appropriate use of the state logo, the Creston Center staff do not want to confuse potential customers by making widespread use of the logo to represent the Creston Center.

DELIVERY OF ONE-STOP SERVICES TO CUSTOMERS

Services for Individual Customers

“Core” services currently available to customers at the Creston Workforce Development Center include:

- *Access to job listings and job matching services* through the ALEX system, using on-site terminals. Access to ALEX is also available through a kiosk in a local grocery store.
- *Application for and receipt of UI benefits.*
- *Access to self-service labor market information* through written and automated information in the Resource Center.
- *Testing/assessment.* Customers eligible for categorical programs may receive a formal battery of tests. In addition, a self-driven assessment program called Jumpstart is available in the Resource Room.

- *Self-service career planning activities* within the Resource Room, including CHOICES, which includes career interest information as well as information about local training providers, and a library of career-related videos.
- *Self-service training and job search training activities* within the Resource Room, including use of resume preparation software and keyboarding training.
- *Written information on local employers and training providers* through CHOICES software, as well as through brochures and assorted materials available within the Resource Room.
- *Information about and referral to available community services* including training resources and family support services. Information and referral is provided by reception staff and through written materials in the Resource Room.

Many of these services, particularly the self-driven services, have been developed as part of the One-Stop initiative. The staff of the individual partner programs still require training on the self-driven services in order to direct their customers to the programs from which they would benefit most.

At the time of the site visit, there was considerable uncertainty among Center staff about which services were available to the general public and which were limited to customers of specific categorical programs. Services currently limited to selected customers based on individual eligibility include the following:

- *Individualized service planning, counseling, and case management services* are reserved for participants in Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services, JTPA economically disadvantaged or dislocated worker programs, older worker programs, and PROMISE JOBS (welfare to work).
- *Group job search training/job clubs* are reserved for participants in the PROMISE JOBS program.
- *Placement in on-the-job training* is reserved for participants in JTPA programs.
- *Tuition and supportive service payments* is reserved for participants enrolled in training through PROMISE JOBS and JTPA. However, due to funding shortages, no new customers have been enrolled in occupational training in PROMISE JOBS for the last two years.

Services for Employer Customers

Local staff at the Creston Center have not yet developed new services for employer customers. Although such services have been discussed among staff, and staff of different categorical programs have begun to share information about local employers on a more regular basis in order to prevent duplication of services, the Center has not yet developed a clear strategy about what new services to develop for employers or how to market them to employers.

Currently, Center staff post job listings and provide referrals, initial screening, and testing for employers when appropriate. However, over the long term, Center staff hope to serve employers better as a result of increased Center participation in local economic development initiatives and school-to-work initiatives. Staff associated with the Center feel that improved regional linkages with school-to-work and economic development initiatives offer tremendous promise to transform the Center from a resource for job seekers into a resource for labor exchange and training more broadly. By marketing job seekers on a regional basis and encouraging local K-12 schools to include career education as an important element of primary and secondary education, the Center hopes to help both existing and new employers locate job seekers that meet their needs.

CUSTOMER RESPONSE

Individuals

Because many of the planned changes to the workforce development service system had not yet occurred at the time of the site visit, the customers to whom we spoke still considered themselves the clients of a particular agency and program, rather than of an integrated workforce development system. As part of the One-Stop evaluation site visit, informal discussions were held with customers of Job Service's job placement services and participants in the PROMISE JOBS program for AFDC recipients.

All customers praised the services they were receiving. Most indicated that they were treated with respect and that staff were helpful and supportive. However, customers did not seem to have very high expectations about the quality or sophistication of the services they received. Most were unaware, prior to enrolling in their respective programs, that such services were available at all through the public sector. They were, therefore, grateful for whatever assistance they received and hesitant to request additional services.

Customers enrolled in intensive services through targeted programs expressed particularly high levels of enthusiasm for their case managers. Customers enrolled in long-term training programs greatly appreciated the case managers' thoughtfulness, patience, and support.

Customers who had had contact with workforce development services over an extended period commented favorably on the new decor and remodeling process, but most were unaware of the Center's effort to "reinvent" its services and service-delivery strategies. This is not surprising, because the Creston Center is still early in this transformation process. However, customers who were aware of the Center's transformation efforts understood the reforms to be the result of federal and state budget reductions rather than part of an overall strategy to improve workforce development services to individual and employer customers.

Employers

Several employers who participated in a focus group discussion during the evaluation site visit expressed interest in the development of new employer-oriented services. However, respondents were not aware of the intended statewide transformation of public workforce development services as part of the One-Stop initiative. They reported "being asked more questions" by Workforce Development staff, but were unaware of any substantial changes in the available services. Because many local firms have recently downsized, private sector human resources staff often lack the capacity they once had to recruit new employees. As a result, employers have become more interested in receiving assistance in the hiring process from the public sector. The fact that the Center will provide screened referrals free of charge was cited as a major incentive for local employers to use the public system.

Additionally, employers expressed enthusiasm for public involvement in school-to-work initiatives, to address the difficulty they are currently having in finding new recruits with good work-readiness skills. Employers also indicated their interest in attracting hard-working young people into their firms so they could train them and "move [them] up through the ranks." They indicated that the Center might play an important role in the local labor exchange by facilitating career education and internship/externship opportunities for students leaving high school.

ASSESSMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED

The federal One-Stop Implementation Grant was a clear catalyst in getting state and local One-Stop planners to begin redesigning workforce development services and service delivery mechanisms in the state of Iowa. However, because the state has promised to implement large-scale change in a relatively short length of time, local Workforce Development Centers are springing up throughout the state even though the concept of service integration and transformed services is not well understood and is highly controversial at the local level. Marketing the One-Stop vision internally and overcoming internal staff resistance to the One-Stop initiative will be a challenge for both the state and local sites in the coming months. In Creston, the solid personal relationships among local partners and the close-knit nature of the community provide a foundation upon which agreement about transformed services can be achieved.

Confusion about the relative roles of the state and the local partners in the design of One-Stop centers has also influenced the evolution of the Creston Workforce Development Center. Although the state has encouraged local sites to develop local One Stop systems that are responsive to their particular needs, local areas are dependent on the state for many of the self-service technologies and management information systems upon which One-Stop services will be built. Where state control ends and local discretion begins is not yet well established.

The staff of the Creston Workforce Development Center have approached the One-Stop initiative with varying levels of enthusiasm. Although good communication and coordination are strong features of the Creston Center, staff have not yet achieved a well-developed blueprint for integrated workforce development services. To further support the next stages of service transformation, all staff would benefit from capacity building in the areas of teamwork and technology use, both of which have the potential to assist the partners in identifying common objectives and moving toward integrated services.